



Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler: Painting Without Rules **Palazzo Strozzi in Florence Celebrates the Artist's Innovative Practice Through the Lens of Reciprocal Influence and Friendship**

Opening at Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in September 2024 and co-organized by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, the exhibition marks the largest presentation of Frankenthaler works ever shown in Italy

Helen Frankenthaler: Painting Without Rules explores the innovative and creative output of Helen Frankenthaler, considered among the most significant painters of the 20th century, through the lens of her artistic affinities, influences, and friendships. Comprising 30 of Frankenthaler's poetic abstractions created between 1953 and 2002, the exhibition is punctuated with select paintings and sculptures by contemporaries who formed part of her inner circle, including Anthony Caro, Morris Louis, Robert Motherwell, Kenneth Noland, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, David Smith, and Anne Truitt. *Painting Without Rules* celebrates the pioneering spirit of an artist who defied the rules of painting and never stopped exploring new ways to make art.

On view from September 27, 2024, through January 26, 2025, at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, Italy, the exhibition is co-organized by Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and curated by Douglas Dreishpoon, Director, Helen Frankenthaler Catalogue Raisonné. With significant loans from the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation and Frankenthaler's personal collection, this project marks one of the most robust presentations of Frankenthaler's paintings and sculptures in Europe and the most comprehensive survey of her work to be mounted in Italy to date. Significant, among others, are also the loans from museums and private collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the ASOM Collection, and the Levett Collection.

Arturo Galansino, Director General of Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, states, "We are thrilled to bring Helen Frankenthaler's work to Italy at an unprecedented scale, introducing new audiences to one of the greatest American artists of the twentieth century. With her innovative and no-rules approach, Frankenthaler stood out as a pioneering figure in the field of abstract painting, expanding the potential of the genre in ways that continue to inspire artists today."

"Helen Frankenthaler's dedication to painting was enriched by her friendships with artists, some of whom became part of her extended family," remarks Douglas Dreishpoon. "Frankenthaler's artistic circle was like an ecosystem of creative forces in constant play. Seeing their work in close company enables us to better understand Frankenthaler's own innovations."

Born in New York City in 1928, Frankenthaler studied studio art and art history with Paul Feeley at Bennington College, before returning to Manhattan, where she gravitated to abstract art. By the early 1950s she had gained direct access to the New York School and key figures in postwar American art, some of whom became part of her social circle. Frankenthaler surrounded herself early on with kindred artists who shared her unwavering commitment to experimentation. With trusted friends she shared studio visits, ongoing correspondence, and poignant perspectives on life. She also collected friends' work, which was prominently displayed in her Manhattan home. Among them, *Helen's Collage*, 1957, a paper collage by Robert Motherwell; *Aleph Series V*, 1960, a painting by Morris Louis; and *Ascending the Stairs*, 1979-83, a sculpture by Anthony Caro, will all be on view in *Painting Without Rules*.

Organized chronologically, the exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi tracks the development of Frankenthaler's creative practice over six decades, with each gallery dedicated to a decade. Frankenthaler's artistic innovations, seen in tandem with contemporaneous paintings, sculptures, and works on paper by friends, sheds light on the synergies and affinities between these artists.

The exhibition demonstrates the well-established influence of Jackson Pollock on Frankenthaler in the 1950s. Pollock's *Number 14*, 1951, an abstract black and white enamel painting that hints at subliminal imagery, is shown alongside Frankenthaler's *Mediterranean Thoughts*, 1960, a colorful oil painting with similar "elements of realism abstracted or Surrealism"—a phrase Frankenthaler used to describe Pollock's work after seeing it in person in 1951. Viewers will be invited to make visual connections between subsequent works and their affinities. For instance, Frankenthaler's *Tutti-Frutti*, 1966, a buoyant painting of colored clouds created using her innovative soak-stain technique, finds a Euclidean analog in David Smith's *Untitled*, 1964, a painted steel sculpture constructed of geometric shapes stacked one on top of another, all coasting on four small wheels. Frankenthaler's own sculptures are also included in the exhibition. *Heart of London Map*, 1972, a steel assemblage, bears an affinity to Anthony Caro's *Ascending the Stairs*, 1979-83, in its piece-by-piece construction. Frankenthaler's works from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s are a testament to an artist who never stopped breaking the rules to explore new ways to make art.

The exhibition is augmented with educational projects that will provide visitors access to Frankenthaler's life, her artistic practice and community through archival documentation, photographs, and correspondence between friends.

Helen Frankenthaler: Painting Without Rules is co-organized by Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and Helen Frankenthaler Foundation. Institutional Supporters: Comune di Firenze, Regione Toscana, Camera di Commercio di Firenze. Private Supporters: Fondazione CR Firenze, Intesa Sanpaolo, Palazzo Strozzi Partners Committee.

About Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011) is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting and is best known for her invention of the soak-stain technique. Throughout a career spanning more than six decades, Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly, producing unique paintings on canvas and paper, as well as ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking. Frankenthaler’s substantial body of work continues to make a profound impact on contemporary art and is represented in the collections of major museums worldwide.

About Helen Frankenthaler Foundation

Established and endowed by Helen Frankenthaler during her lifetime, the [Helen Frankenthaler Foundation](#) advances the artist’s legacy and inspires a new generation of practitioners through a range of philanthropic, educational, and research initiatives. Since becoming active in 2013, the Foundation has continued to strategically expand its program, which includes organizing and supporting significant exhibitions of the artist’s work, fostering new research and publications, advancing educational programs in partnership with arts organizations around the world, and launching groundbreaking initiatives that foster systemic change in the field. As a primary resource on the artist, and a steward of her collection and archive, the Foundation holds an extensive selection of Frankenthaler’s work in a variety of mediums, her collection of works by other artists, and original papers and materials pertaining to her life and work.

About Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi

A dynamic cultural center set within a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture, Palazzo Strozzi is a focal point of Italy’s art scene and a key cultural hub in the heart of Florence. Since its inception in 2006, the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi has organized more than 70 exhibitions, attracting in excess of three million visitors to date. Creating a lively dialogue between the old and the new, Palazzo Strozzi’s exhibitions range from critically acclaimed historical surveys of old masters, such as Donatello and Verrocchio, to site-specific collaborations with leading contemporary artists including [Ai Weiwei](#), Jeff Koons, [Marina Abramović](#), Olafur Eliasson, Anish Kapoor, and Anselm Kiefer (on view until July 21, 2024). This unique mix of the historical setting and contemporary programme makes Palazzo Strozzi an active workshop for the new in Florence: where new artworks are produced, new studies and discoveries are made, and the public are engaged in discussions about important issues in contemporary society.

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